The Phases of ESL – Outlined in the NTCF

To identify and provide appropriate levels of support for ESL learners it is necessary to recognise three broad phases of ESL learners' language development. The descriptors at each level are only intended to be examples of typical behaviours and students will not necessarily fulfil every one.

Phase 1

Phase 1 ESL learners are acquiring the basic English language skills needed to communicate in the classroom, school and community. At this stage in their English language development they are unable to cope with the language demands of a mainstream classroom.
These students range from complete beginners who

- may use a first language extensively, or go through a silent period in the classroom
- cannot negotiate meaning in English
- express themselves using single words and body language

to learners who are

- beginning to contribute comments in English in familiar school and social situations
- beginning to read and write in English (if appropriate for their age)
- familiar with the culture of the school.

Students who are literate in their 1st language may read and write in English at a level which is in advance of their oral abilities in English.

Phase 2

2nd phase ESL learners are confident in social communication in English, and respond to the reading and writing tasks of some classroom activities, but have difficulty using English language for learning.
These students range from learners who

- are stronger in interpersonal use of language than informational use
- are heavily dependent upon explicit explanations and teacher support to carry out classroom activities successfully
- need extra time to complete language based task

to learners who:

- are able to understand some content from oral and written texts but their understandings need constant support/scaffolding; they frequently need parts of texts restated and find it difficult to sustain listening and understanding for an extended period.
- with support beginning to use a wider range of English and some academic language in written texts.

ESL students of average learning ability, social adjustment and with uninterrupted schooling may move beyond the 2nd phase of ESL learning after approximately 5 to 7 years of instruction with ESL support. However some students may experience difficulty in progressing beyond this phase as the language demands of schooling become more abstract and complex.

Phase 3

3rd phase ESL learners are those students who are confident in using English in social situations but still have some have difficulty using English in academic contexts. These students range from learners who

- understand written texts at a literal level but have difficulty in identifying implied meanings, author's viewpoint and bias, and relationships and connections between information
- have well developed understandings and use of English language for the purposes of social discourse but still experience difficulty in using and following academic and classroom discourse used for developing new or deeper understandings and concepts
- be unable to demonstrate their abilities because of difficulty in coping with the language demands of complex or lengthy written assignments

to learners who

- have reached the end of the 3rd phase and can communicate in English with confidence and flexibility in social and academic situations appropriate to their age group.

ESL students of average learning ability, social adjustment and with uninterrupted schooling may reach the end of the 3rd phase of ESL learning after approximately 7 to 10 years of instruction with ESL support.

Indigenous languages spoken in the Northern Territory

Language groups in the Northern Territory are diverse, with many Indigenous language speakers being fluent in up to three or more languages. In southern regions of the NT, the language groups tend to be large, with a dominant language spoken within a community. Community members may speak several languages according to family links with other communities, but use the main language of the region for community interactions. In the Top End, the language groups are much smaller and in some communities there are a number of languages in common use.

Kriol is an Aboriginal language derived from early Creoles used in the NT, QLD and WA. Although the language borrows many words from English, the syntactic structures are not necessarily the same as English. Kriol is not to be confused with Aboriginal English. It is a language with it's own linguistic features. The book, *Making the Jump* (Berry & Hudson, 1997) has information about Kriol and its evolution.

Indigenous people across the NT will have family links and involvements with communities in QLD, SA and WA so they will also speak the languages of those communities.

Aboriginal English is the name given to dialects of English which are spoken by Indigenous people and which differ from Standard Australian English in systematic ways. It is a valid, rule-governed variety of English and is the home language of many Indigenous children.

The language maps on the following page show the main language groups of Australia and the Top End of the Northern Territory.